

A photograph of a city skyline at sunset. The sky is a mix of pink, orange, and purple. Several tall buildings are visible, including a prominent one with a pointed roof and another with a 'W' logo. The buildings are reflected in a body of water in the foreground, which is dark and still.

Looking to the future Reflecting on the past

November 2019



GEORGIA VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION AGENCY

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Get to Know a Legislator

This Month We Feature Valencia Stovall



Representative Valencia Stovall was first elected in 2012 to represent the citizens in House District 74, which includes portions of the cities of Morrow, Lake City, Forest Park, Riverdale and College Park.

The native Atlantan and mother of two has a strong and diverse background in finance, entrepreneurship, advocacy and public policy. She is also a local business owner. She currently serves as a member of the Appropriations, Economic Development & Tourism, Education, Interstate Cooperation and Small Business Development committees. She has previously served as vice chair of the House Medical Cannabis Working Group, chair of Study Committee on the Revitalization of the Atlanta State Farmers Market, member of the Joint Study Committee on Establishment of a Leadership Academy and special Education Sub-committee on School Redesign, as well as a commissioner on the Georgia Literacy Commission and Georgia Council for the Arts (appointed by former Governor Nathan Deal). She has also served as a member of the Clayton State University Dean of Arts & Science Advisory Council, co-chair of United Way THRIVE Clayton and is a member of local PTSAs.

Rep. Stovall recently received the highest national appointment in her political career by the Georgia House Speaker as she was tapped to become a member of the National Council of State Legislatures

(NCSL) Education Standing Committee. She is a former commissioner on the Georgia Education Reform Commission-Early Learning (appointed by Governor Deal), member of the first Georgia Early Childcare Quality Rated Advisory Board, a board member for the Atlanta Council of PTA's, served on multiple school councils and a former charter school board chair and advisory member.

In 2018, Rep. Stovall authored House Resolution 279, which was her second piece of legislation that was signed into law. HR 279 designates Single Parent Day as March 21st every year in Georgia. In 2016, as a second term legislator, Rep. Stovall authored House Bill 614, or the Landon Dunson Act, which was signed into law in May 2016 to allow video cameras to be placed in the self-contained classrooms of special needs students in any public schools. At the time, Georgia was the second state to pass this type of video camera legislation. She has authored and co-sponsored other legislation to improve the lives of Georgians. She has co-authored many bills which have been signed into law, the majority of which were education centered.

Rep. Stovall also hosts several annual community events including a career job fair, which has drawn over 1,000 job seekers since its inception in 2013, and Dance on the Bridge Celebration, where she has recognized over 1,000 parent and community volunteers. She has earned respect for standing firm on her beliefs even when it is unpopular. She strives to do her part in making Clayton County and the State of Georgia the best places to live, work and play.



Behind the Machines

One Client and an International Manufacturing Company

When Cole Allen was in high school, sometimes his friends would go places his power chair—and as a result, he himself—couldn't. The woods for a campfire. A house with stairs to the entrance.

At Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS) though, this wasn't a problem. There wasn't a place on campus that he couldn't go, the entirety of the property and the buildings therein outfitted with accessible doors, sidewalks and ramps. This sense of empowerment wasn't just limited to his mobility around campus either. At RWS, Cole became involved in the student council and jumped on other leadership opportunities, and his peers noticed.

"I learned that I had leadership skills, and it felt good to know that," Cole said. "People wanted to talk to me about stuff, about problems they were having, and I helped their drive to be all that they could be. You've got to grow yourself in the way that you're afraid of because when you get there and you make friends and talk to people, you hear other people's stories and you realize that you're all in this together."

Cole knows the importance of community and a strong support system because that's exactly what he found when he arrived at RWS several years ago. Being drawn to the field of engineering at a young age, Cole had learned about computer-aided drafting (CAD)—and the blueprints such a system produces—when he was in high school. Billy Garrett, the Computer Numerical Control (CNC) instructor at RWS, helped him take what he had already learned to the next level. Put in layman's terms, when a machine breaks at a factory, the replacement part is designed in a CAD system, which then produces a 2-D blueprint that is fed into a CNC machine

that then builds the replacement part. With the knowledge he gained at RWS and the CNC certification that came with it, Cole could navigate every part of the process. There was no doubt, Billy said, that Cole would take this knowledge and use it to start his career.

"Cole is a great example of what all educators want to see in students ... an individual with a thirst for knowledge and initiative to get it. He was always the first to arrive and the last to leave," Billy said. "He wants to work, and he wants to make his own way."

After graduating in June of 2017, Cole set his sights on finding a job, and with his hometown of Carrollton being home to the largest copper wire manufacturer in the world in Southwire, it made sense that it would be a natural landing place for his skill set.

And Southwire agreed.

He was hired in late 2018, and after Southwire made several modifications to ensure Cole's workspace was accessible, he began work there in January of this year, the goal of applying what he learned to real world practice finally realized.

Cole is the first to tell you he's not done setting and achieving his goals. So what's next? He said he hopes to one day go to college and earn his engineering degree, and after that, he hopes to start his own business producing machine parts for those who need them.

"I never want to stop learning," he said. "We learn so much every day, but we may not know it. But it's true."





Cole Allen, a graduate of Roosevelt Warm Springs, has been working at international manufacturer Southwire since January of this year. Cole works to digitize old blue prints and create 3-D models.



On the Go

GVRA Sensory Staff Gets the Word Out

National Federation of the Blind

Shirley Robinson, Assistant Director of Blind Services and Kay McGill, Program Manager of Project Independence recently participated in the National Federation of the Blind of Georgia (NFBG) annual convention.

The National Federation of the Blind of Georgia Annual State Convention is an ever-growing gathering of blind people, with a program agenda that serves to educate and empower. Each year blind persons, their family members, blindness professionals, service providers, and other interested individuals have the opportunity to network and exchange information and ideas.

At the event, Kay presented on Project Independence: GA Vision Program for Adults Age 55 and Over at both the Senior Division and General meetings. Shirley and Kay networked with the 140 attendees throughout the three days of the convention addressing the questions and listening to the comments of the attendees regarding GVRA. Their attendance and outreach was very important to bridge the gap between the agency and the public at large.

Georgia Vision Alliance

The Georgia Vision Alliance (GVA) met in Augusta in early November. The group is working to improve services for the blind in the state. In addition to both Shirley and Kay, the GVA meeting featured GVRA Executive Director Shawn Ryan who provided an update via phone on GVRA; Representative Wayne Howard (Augusta) who gave information on the Commission for the Blind bill; Chris Harvey, Elections Director for the Georgia Secretary of State who brought, set up and had participants use the state's latest voting machine

technology; and Denine Woodson, GVRA Director of Sensory Services.

Vision Serve Alliance

Shirley and Kay attended and participated in the Vision Serve Alliance (VSA) Executive Leadership Conference in November in Atlanta. The 176 attendees were from all over the USA. They included the presidents of the National Federation of the Blind, American Council of the Blind, American Foundation for the Blind, National Industries for the Blind, and American Printing House for the Blind; executive directors of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, Blinded Veterans Association. This was in addition to a host of presidents, executive directors and representatives from other state agencies and key blind entities. Kay and Shirley led break out groups – Kay on funding and Shirley on recruiting.

What is the Future of Vision Services? The group participated in deep dialog around emerging needs and challenges in the field and acting to facilitate change.

Georgia Radio Reading Service

Kay McGill 's Georgia Radio Reading Service interview on Project Independence aired November 16th. You can access the audio by going to garrs.org, click on the "Program Library", then the "Service Program" page and finally click on "At Your Service". You will hear a very informative and detailed description of Project Independence: GA Vision Program for Adults Age 55 and Over.





ABOVE: (Front Row) Deborah Lovell, SRC member and Family Outreach Coordinator for the Department of Veterans Affairs; Kay McGill. (Back Row) Denine Woodson, Shirley Robinson and Todd Turansky, VIST Coordinator for the Department of Veterans Affairs.



BELOW: The crowd gathers at the Vision Serve Alliance meeting.

Way to Go!

The DAS Employee of the Month

The following nomination was submitted by Laverne Williams in the category of Agency Commitment:

It is with great pleasure that I nominate Xavier Railey as the Employee of the Month. Xavier started with the agency September 2018 as a Disability Adjudicator Trainee in Unit 45. Since completion of early training, Xavier performed above standards and is eager to keep improving. Xavier keeps his caseload low and is always up to date on his follow-ups and other actions. Xavier works independently and does not hesitate to seek assistance when needed. Xavier is open-minded about mistakes and works hard to process his cases accurately.

Xavier often serves as a mentor to other adjudicators as well.



He is always willing to assist other adjudicators with problem cases or vocational issues. Xavier consistently has a pleasant demeanor and gets along very well with others. Xavier is a great asset to the agency.

Prioritizing Service

RWS Service Award Winners for October

Four RWS staff members received service awards at the October all staff meeting in Warm Springs. From left to right they are: Theresa Williams, 20 years; Larry Howard, 5 years and Carlisa Edwards, 5 years. Not pictured is Zhanna Powell, 5 years.



Teaching the Next Generation

Mercer Gets \$1 million to Address CRC Shortage

By Mercer Director of Media Relations Kyle Sears

Mercer University's College of Professional Advancement recently received its second grant of nearly \$1 million from the U.S. Department of Education to help address personnel shortages faced by vocational rehabilitation agencies in Georgia.

The five-year, \$984,963 Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) long-term training grant will support the College's Master of Science in Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling program offered on the Cecil B. Day Graduate and Professional Campus in Atlanta.

Grant funding will support scholarships for a total of 40 RSA Scholars who will be recruited and trained by Mercer and employed by the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency and other disability-related agencies to address shortages across the state.

The College of Professional Advancement previously received a five-year, \$956,956 RSA grant in 2015, which resulted in successful recruitment and training of 40 RSA Scholars. Of the 11 scholars who have graduated thus far, seven are employed by the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency or related agencies, two are enrolled in a Ph.D. program and two are in the process of obtaining employment.

"I am extremely happy that through this new grant we can support and train 40 more scholars to become highly skilled rehabilitation counselors," said Dr. Suneetha B. Manyam, professor of counseling. "As project director, I strongly encourage students who are interested in becoming certified rehabilitation counselors and who are passionate about serving individuals

with disabilities to apply immediately and utilize this wonderful opportunity."

"I congratulate Dr. Manyam and the amazing team of counseling faculty members that developed such a compelling grant proposal that reiterates our commitment to address powerfully the state's shortage of counseling professionals equipped to dramatically improve outcomes for individuals with disabilities," added Dr. Priscilla Danheiser, dean of the College of Professional Advancement.

The Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency reports a shortage of qualified rehabilitation counselors, while the state's Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that field is expected to grow by 20 percent by 2022.

In response to such data, Mercer established the M.S. in Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling in 2013, with a goal of increasing the number of qualified master's-level rehabilitation counselors, especially those who closely reflect the diverse population of the country, region and state. The program's evening classes are designed for working adults, and its location in Atlanta serves the largest area in the state requiring vocational rehabilitation services.

"We appreciate Mercer's commitment to create a solid foundation for future vocational rehabilitation professionals. The University's strong curriculum will help develop certified rehabilitation counselors who know how to cultivate competitive integrated employment opportunities for our clients," said Dr.



Christine Fleming, director of vocational services for the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency.

"The fact that we were awarded this grant for the second time is a testament to the hardworking and dedicated counseling faculty, to our students, to the clinical rehabilitation counseling program and to the profession. I am extremely proud of our faculty and students and am especially appreciative of the tremendous support we have been given by our dean and provost," added Dr. Karen Rowland, associate professor and chair of counseling.

"I'm excited that we have the opportunity to continue collaborating with the Rehabilitation Services Administration to educate outstanding students in clinical rehabilitation counseling," said Dr. Kristina Henderson, assistant professor and program coordinator of the M.S. in Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling. "Our students are passionate and dedicated to working with and for persons with disabilities, and this grant makes opportunities to accomplish that work more accessible."

Applications are currently being accepted for the upcoming cohort of RSA Scholars, which will begin in January. Grant funding supports three semesters of tuition, living expenses and some travel to professional conferences.

For more information on the grant, contact Dr. Manyam at (678) 547-6032, and for information on the program, contact Dr. Henderson at (678) 547-6497, Marc Reece at (678) 547-6024 or Leslie Baxter at (678) 547-6411.

About the College of Professional Advancement

Mercer University's College of Professional Advancement is committed to serving post-traditional learners. Undergraduate, graduate and certificate programs are offered to adult learners seeking professional advancement into leadership roles in and beyond their communities. Programs provide students with distinctive, multidisciplinary experiences that integrate theory and practice. In addition to providing general education and elective courses for various colleges and schools at Mercer, the College of Professional Advancement offers degree programs in areas including technology, public safety, public and human services, leadership and administration, health care and liberal arts. Programs are offered on Mercer's campuses in Atlanta and Macon, as well as Regional Academic Centers in Douglas County and Henry County, and online.



Showing Their Team Spirit

Scenes From RWS' Annual Tailgate Party



Although rainy weather forced the event indoors, spirits were high during the annual tailgate party at Roosevelt Warm Springs organized by the Employee Moral and Recognition Team. Attendees cheered for their favorite teams and shared food and fun in the Roosevelt Hall Atrium. The event included raffles in support of the RWS chapter of the Georgia Rehabilitation Association and the local holiday food drive. All special events like this at Warm Springs are sponsored by the Roosevelt Warm Springs Development Fund.



Saluting Those Who Served

GVRA Celebrates Veterans Day 2019

In honor of Veterans Day, GVRA wanted to send a special thank you to our coworkers who served to protect our freedoms. If you see them, please thank them for their service.

They include:

Antonio Waller (4 years service in the Navy)

Anita Thompson (7.5 years service in the Army),

Robert Schacht (1 year service in the Navy)

Sakinah Jackson (7 years service in the Army)

Simone Clarke (21 years service in the Army)

Michael Pringle (7 years service in the Army)

Arthur Dale Brawley (12 years service in the Army)

Sheila Lamons (11 years service in the Air Force, Army and Army Reserves)

TwilWanda DeVauld-Bryant (20 years service in the Army)

Teresa Eggleston (37 years service in the Air Force)

James Rumer (25 years service in the Air Force)

Thank you again to all GVRA's veterans.



**The first step toward
change is awareness.**

**The second step
is acceptance.**

~ Nathaniel Branden

Thank You

I've said it before—and I can assure you this won't be the last time—but this newsletter is a team effort. When I first started at the agency, leadership wanted a premier media vehicle that would highlight the good GVRA does and keep staff, disability community members, partners and the public at large in the know. From humble beginnings, this newsletter grew into the publication it is today, and I couldn't be prouder.

So to everyone that has helped make that happen, I want to say thank you. If there's ever anything you'd like included, please shoot me a line at john.boan@gvs.ga.gov.

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